

LOUIS JOSEPH PAPINEAU

A Divided Soul

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LOUIS JOSEPH PAPINEAU, A DIVIDED SOUL

Papineau's career in politics will always form an important chapter of our history. For nearly thirty years before the Rebellion of 1837, he was an advocate of reform in Lower Canada, and became the chief spokesman of his race. But it is as a man that he remains a particularly fascinating and difficult study. He was, if not neurotic, at least often and easily dominated by strong feeling, and so sensitive that he could be deeply wounded by incidents which a more robust nature would have shrugged off. An intensely emotional response to life was perhaps his dominant trait. He was unstable, given to high enthusiasms but also to doubts and hesitations and, when disappointed by "sullen reality", to fits of melancholy, pessimism and even misanthropy. He was a strong individualist who resented and was inclined to rebel against the constraints imposed by both organized society and established religion. Yet he was aware at an early age of the dangers of his own impulsiveness, a "source of chagrin" for him in private as in public life.

His impulse to rebel was contradicted by a reluctance to act decisively, of which he was equally conscious. He constantly deplored it — "my unfortunate dominating tendency" — and tried to resist it all his life, because it threatened to condemn him to an existence of boredom, distrust and bitter reflection. Politics was a strange vocation for such a man to choose; for him decisions and commitments always entailed pain and even tragedy. Writing to his friend Louis Fréchette, he insisted: "We are respectable revolutionaries We are revolutionaries of a philosophical age." Respectable, philosophical revolutionaries could be excused for preaching more than they were anxious or able to practice. Nevertheless it was precisely his dislike of action that led him to devise a technique largely responsible for the success of his political career — a technique of verbal protest and systematic opposition. By thus mobilizing to the task of political opposition the weaknesses of his character (among which a persecution complex was by no means the least) he was able to escape their tyranny and, sometimes, to live at peace with himself.

He often longed for the Arcadian seclusion of his seigniory at Montebello. He preferred the companionship of family and close friends to worldly society, in which he hid his timidity behind a rather haughty manner. At the balls in the Château St. Louis, to which he was often invited, he would retire to the sidelines and play chess. He was continually lauding private life and disparaging public life. His letters bear eloquent testimony to the cruel contrast which he felt existed between the two. "I have never felt the need," he declared, "for this tumult of politics. I feel it even less after seven years of desuetude. It was a painful duty, which I undertook in spite of my

preference for seclusion and family life." The ties of kinsfolk and friends, he thought, serve to reconcile a man to the rest of the world and to himself. But life outside this intimate circle subjects one to competition, rivalry and impersonal relations based on diversity of interest; a cold world, which Papineau feared. This attitude was important in the working out of his political and social ideas. According to him, the new form of society that was being established through the efforts of English merchants menaced the interests — the very human interests — of the traditional family-based French Canadian society. It was not by chance that Papineau always placed the agricultural community in opposition to the trading community; in his eyes they represented different and incompatible sets of values.

Papineau's temperament inclined him towards very lofty political and moral ideals. He had an exaggerated sense of duty, greatness, dignity and purity. "I have set up maxims and duties for myself to which I am enslaved," he said. "I am bound by the obligation of serving my country as a citizen, surrounded by risks and disappointments and sensible of an increasing distaste. I find pleasure in telling myself that I have fulfilled my duty. However painful it may have been at the time, one finds consolation later." But Papineau also had a strong streak of vanity, of ambition and — although his career gave it little scope — of avarice. This last trait is easy to discover in him. His friends often took the liberty of chaffing him on his thriftiness. But with him greed for material goods served his need for security and affection, although it was not less strong on that account. His avarice was, in a sense, sublimated into a more refined emotion. In part, his desire to exercise authority takes its origin here. It lent extra strength to his ambition and sense of duty. Yet at the same time he was genuinely drawn to a simple, retired and austere life. Weak-willed and intensely emotional, he was thus constantly pulled in different directions. He would be driven into action by ambition, duty or rebellious impulse; then, his feelings wounded, he would long to escape from the world. But unrelieved solitude weighed heavily on him; he needed affection and an admiring audience. He also needed to affirm his ideals and his moral worth in the eyes of the world. Dignity, on which he insisted so much, may become indistinguishable from pride and social ambition; an exalted sense of duty may be a flimsy disguise for ambition and vanity; feelings of greatness may be simply the reflection of an intense desire for security. With Papineau, conformity and insurrection lodged in the same camp.

Unequal though he was to the demands of action, Papineau became the leader of a party which controlled the assembly. He decided to use his power at all costs and in disregard of the resistance offered by the bureaucracy, the government and the clergy. Under the strain imposed by this programme, he came to regard himself, in effect,

as two men. One was the man free from the vicissitudes of action, the man of principle, incorruptible, devoted to justice and liberty. The other was the man involved in concrete events and exposed to harassments, the leader of a party at the service of well-defined interests, distressed by his own weaknesses and pulled by duty, interest and inclination. He had no choice but to pursue his destiny and pay the penalty of the first man's undertakings. In suffering repulse he became a martyr, "who achieved the triumph of principles, sanctified the victims, converted the tyrants, and preserved the believers". Only by creating this double myth for himself could the inactive and hyper-emotional Papineau withstand the anguish of his total involvement in action.

In his fiery speeches, his frequent fits of temperament and his stubborn conduct as a politician, Papineau appears to us as at least outwardly pugnacious. All too often we forget his persuasive charm. This aspect of his personality can hardly be stressed too strongly; it gave him a kind of magnetism, especially where women were concerned. Joined with his outward endowments, this almost feminine quality proved a valuable trump-card in his political career. His power to charm partly explains the attraction he asserted over the people; it was a most effective instrument of domination. It enabled him to suggest, without making open accusations, who their political enemies were and to encourage obstructive tactics without actually having to give his followers explicit directives. This manner of proceeding helped to soothe his always lively sense of scruples.

Papineau had broad and eclectic intellectual tastes. In 1842 he wrote: "Love of study becomes a praiseworthy passion and the strongest safeguard against foolish passions." He found, in his intensive examination of the works of the eighteenth-century rationalists, values and ideas to combat his faults. Their optimistic outlook on human nature and their ideal of wisdom, demanding no adherence to any religious confession, afforded the basis for a state of mental health denied him by his rigid childhood faith. It was as much from a need to react against himself as from a desire to nourish an ethical ideal that he became an admirer of Graeco-Roman antiquity and of the Stoics in particular. He had powers of observation and objectivity which should have enabled him to make an important contribution to Canadian thought. But his hyper-emotionalism had been aggravated by his puritanical upbringing and by the constraints which his environment imposed. He was preoccupied by his own internal conflict and his creative possibilities were diminished. He never became master of his own life and conduct. Although he continually insisted on "the unalterable stability of his principles", he was not the creator of a system of values but a disciple — sometimes of Montesquieu, sometimes of Adam Smith, J.-B. Say, Seneca, Voltaire or Jefferson. Said

Taché: "M. Papineau is certainly a great speaker and a man of first-rate talent, but ambition and vanity have made deep ravages in his fine and powerful intelligence, and discontent has embittered his naturally good heart . . .".

FORMATIVE YEARS (1786-1810)

Louis Joseph Papineau, the eldest of eight children, was born at Montreal in 1786. Neither the Papineaus nor his mother's family, the Cherriers, bequeathed him aristocratic or bourgeois traditions, still less any intellectual traditions. Most of them had, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, belonged to a lower level of society, half peasant and half migratory. But at the end of the eighteenth century there was a very decided movement among the Papineaus and their related families towards the liberal professions. Louis Joseph's father, Joseph Papineau, became a notary and represented Montreal in the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada (1792-1809 and 1809-1814). This was the French Canadians' first experience of representative institutions and the elder Papineau, although he spoke eloquently in support of the official use of the French language during the first important debate in 1793, did not feel at home in the Assembly. He preferred not to attend, and had twice to be called before the bar by the sergeant-at-arms for failing to take his seat. In accordance with the new tradition of his family, Louis Joseph Papineau studied law, in the office of his cousin Denis Benjamin Viger. Viger, who was for a time the Assembly's agent in London, became one of Papineau's prominent supporters and close friends; but after the Rebellion he was to follow Lafontaine. Papineau's young brother, Denis Benjamin Papineau, also had a political career, but did not share his brother's views and took no part in the Rebellion of 1837. In the generations of Louis Joseph and of his father the Papineau family thus attained bourgeois circles.

None the less, they remained attached to the traditional family organization. This sizeable and united clan continued to affirm the incontestable supremacy of family virtues over all other human values. In this atmosphere, which was hardly suited to equip him for the outside world, Papineau grew up. In 1801 his father purchased from the Quebec Seminary the seigniory of La Petite Nation on the Ottawa River. Here his later childhood was spent, dominated, as he often later acknowledged, by the female guardians of tradition.

The impressionable and sensitive child was especially disposed to submit to his mother's ascendancy. She was puritanical and authoritative, and he was her favourite. But if he was inclined to adopt her rigid and pessimistic vision of life, he was no less inclined to rebel against over-solicitude. (This ambivalence carried over into

his married life, a proper understanding of which can only emerge when we see the similarity between his wife's religious beliefs and his mother's.) His father's influence was slower to be felt. Notary Papineau concealed a great deal of tenderness behind his peevish manner; but in spite of his strong personality he had turned over to his wife the internal rule of their household and especially the children's upbringing. A man lacking in gaiety and optimism, who found the life of society distasteful, he kept himself barricaded behind his professional activities. He entered politics only under the urging of his friends and from a sense of duty. But although Joseph Papineau was rather distant and hard to reach, he was attracted by intellectual things and quite indulgent; his son formed an idealized picture of him as a great patriot and gentleman farmer. Significantly, this image was to encompass the younger Papineau's two chief undertakings: public life and retirement at Montebello.

His mother hoped that her eldest son would have a vocation for the priesthood, and with her husband's approval sent him to study at the College of Montreal. This was his first experience outside the family circle and it ended in failure. The boy rebelled and had to leave college. After that he was sent to the Seminary of Quebec, where he completed his secondary studies. He succeeded, though not without difficulty, in adapting himself to the life of this institution, where recruitment for the priesthood was a primary objective. A number of the priests at this college were friends of his father, and he found there a more sympathetic atmosphere than among his mother's spiritual advisers. He won the sympathy of a number of his teachers, whom he admired and who made the communal existence endurable for him. All the same, it was in books that the adolescent Papineau, intelligent, shy, disinclined for games, full of enthusiasm but unamenable to group discipline, looked more and more for a refuge and a solution to his problems. Judging from his notes, it seems he was already preoccupied by religious and political questions, although he did take a keen interest in geography and the natural sciences as well. These studies seem to have encouraged scepticism of clerical authority, especially since it was then so preoccupied by hostility to the writings of the eighteenth century philosophers and the French Revolution. Just when the French Canadian *élite* was adapting itself to representative government, teachers of philosophy were resolutely attempting to support theories based on absolute monarchy and divine right. The contradictions between the teaching in the colleges and the new needs of society did not fail to strike young Papineau.

On leaving the Seminary in 1804 he was considered to be a young man of great brilliance, serious and somewhat reserved, but at the same time capable of eloquence when aroused. He had now to choose a profession. That of notary attracted him because it seemed

to promise a peaceful and orderly life. He began his clerkship under his father's direction, but soon abandoned it. Next he chose law. Reading works of jurisprudence seems to have stimulated him; clerical work, on the other hand, repelled him. His first experiences in what he called the "den of chicanery" dealt a hard knock to his idealism. Called to the bar in 1810, he practised his profession in intermittent fashion and without deriving any satisfaction from it. He tried, therefore, to leave it as soon as circumstances seemed favourable. About this time he began chanting the praises of nature, private life and solitude, thereby revealing a failure to adjust to a career which, after all, he himself had chosen. But a sudden event was about to change the course of his life. In 1809 he was asked to run for the Legislature. He accepted.

The constitution given Lower Canada in 1791, with its elected Legislative Assembly and its appointed Legislative Council, had been intended to secure and reconcile the interests of the merchants and of the big landed proprietors. By the time of Papineau's election, however, the legislature had become an arena of racial conflict. The fact is, after 1791 Lower Canada had witnessed the development of a French Canadian bourgeois middle class, composed of the liberal professions and the small merchants of town and country. This situation arose from the expansion in economy and population. The new class, which had rural origins, became more and more aware of its position and its role. It came to regard itself as the *élite* group among the French and, as such, charged with the defining of collective objectives. In the opinion of this group, the St. Lawrence River no longer constituted the basis for a commercial or industrial empire, as the Anglo-Saxons regarded it. They saw it rather as an inland sea extending from the Gulf of St. Lawrence to Upper Canada. Around it a rural population would in future gravitate, falling back on ancestral traditions from which the alien corruptions of the fur and lumber trades had been purged. For this end, the traditional institutions of French common law and seigneurial tenure seemed eminently appropriate for the removal of capitalist abuses. At the same time they would protect Lower Canada from Anglo-Saxon immigration.

But the realization of this dream meant that power must be assumed by the French Canadian middle class. This, in addition to a desire to give the liberal professions a grip on the administrative posts, was the chief motivation behind the demand for responsible government by members of the *parti canadien*. But the principle of ministerial responsibility aroused irreconcilable opposition. The Anglo-Saxon merchants saw that if the colony were to be governed in this manner, an economic decline would fall over the country; for its prosperity depended on constructive local legislation and the support of the metropolis. The bureaucracy, in turn, feared for the loss of

its privileges and its administrative supremacy. As for the governor, in addition to foreseeing a curtailment of his authority, he regarded ministerial responsibility as a step towards democracy and independence. Lastly, the clergy feared for its social influence and economic privileges and was appalled by the declarations of this lay group, claiming as it did that society should be established on liberal principles and daring to dispute the Church's right to oversee politics. When the Assembly first began to criticize and oppose the administration, and especially in its quarrel with Governor Craig, it therefore did not have the support of the Church.

In spite of his father's warnings, Papineau declared his support of the *parti canadien* and of its chief, Pierre Bédard. He was even involved in Bédard's anti-Semitic activities. Before long Papineau became one of the most influential members of the party. The war with the United States temporarily interrupted his career in politics and, along with several other leaders of the *parti canadien*, he supported the defense of British liberties against "democratic anarchy." After this interlude, Papineau's influence grew steadily, extending beyond the Montreal district to Quebec. Hence, when in 1815 the question arose of choosing a successor to Bédard and Panet, Papineau was picked to fill the double function of party leader and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. Though faithful to certain of Bédard's ideas, Papineau gave the *parti canadien* a directing impulse that was at once more conservative and more liberal.

This became more definite as a result of the conflict provoked by the proposed union of the Canadas in 1822. The "English party" had in fact now become a permanent minority in the Legislative Assembly and was in despair over the French Canadian members' well-nigh systematic obstruction of schemes for economic and legal reform. This party brought before the Parliament of Westminster a project for the union of the two Canadas. Their petition had two main objectives: the political unification of the St. Lawrence valley (a necessary pre-condition for a programme of economic development) and the integration of the French Canadians into the Anglo-Saxon culture. The petition aroused public outcries from French Canada. The clergy themselves were now ready to support opposition. Papineau put himself at the head of the anti-union movement, and he and John Neilson went to England to obstruct the passage of a union bill.

Until then Papineau had been an unreserved admirer of British constitutional monarchy. He believed that, if Great Britain agreed to the full application of the principles of her constitution, French Canadians would find within the Empire not only political advantages and guarantees of survival but even the possibility of self-determination. His reading of political theory seemed to confirm this view. Montes-

quieu, Voltaire, Locke and Blackstone had revealed the advantages of applying liberal principles to the government of men. The writers of the school of natural law — Mably, Adam Smith and the Physiocrats — had demonstrated the numerous benefits which would flow from a more liberal relation between the metropolis and the colonies. These liberal writers, it was true, had also condemned feudalism in all its forms; it was, as Papineau's critics pointed out, not entirely logical to cite them in the defense of French Canadian society. He answered this objection by invoking the right of men to self-determination. In fact, he retained from his reading only what was of use to him in his personal and political struggles. He was a sworn enemy of political pragmatism, which he said was inspired by the "meanness of the mercantile spirit". Nevertheless his own principles were subordinate to his aim: a system that would enable the French Canadian bourgeoisie to remove the Anglo-Saxons from power, to restrain immigration and to control the economic activity of the merchants, as well as their social influence. He was completely given over to his hatreds and affections, and did not see the contradiction between his liberal beliefs and his conservative objective.

The patriot and the liberal in him sometimes merged, but more often they clashed. Together with his torn and problematical personality, this conflict confirmed his dislike not only of action but of compromise. He preferred systematic opposition. "In a country where all the government servants are public enemies", obstruction could be regarded as a positive course of action. "The religious establishment of the country would be reduced to nothing," he maintained, "the notarial profession would be degraded, with not a *Canadien* at the bar, and landed property would be taxed to fatten a crowd of European tax collectors, if the Administration had not been checked by the resistance of the elected Assembly . . .". Only the conservative and the patriot could find any gain in these negative victories.

His trip to England confirmed many of his political opinions. The English Radicals whom he met encouraged him to go on fighting against the old colonial system and the preferential tariff, however necessary these might be to the development of the Canadian economy. On the other hand, he formed an entirely new idea of England. It seemed to him to be dominated by a splendid yet burdensome monarchy and by a powerful aristocracy, devoted to luxury and social inequality. Finally, though he acknowledged the economic dynamism of the country, he was struck by the sight of poverty and the misery of the working class.

When he returned to Canada Papineau became occupied to the full by his rivalry with Vallières de Saint-Réal, who had taken his place as Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. He succeeded in

recovering his position, but circumstances were about to force him to take up increasingly stronger stands. From now on the conservative would be made over into the nationalist and the liberal reformer into the republican.

NATIONALIST AND REPUBLICAN (1826-1837)

After 1826 Papineau can be seen moving in a new direction. Already, in 1820, certain patriotic elements had called for the democratizing of the ranks of the *parti canadien* so as to increase the number of members with a farming background. The deep distress affecting agriculture in Lower Canada and the problem of rural overpopulation (particularly acute in the Montreal region) served to raise up the farmers against the Anglo-Saxon merchants and immigrants. Likewise, a favourable climate for the nationalist movement was created by the enormous growth in the ranks of the French Canadian middle class, whose economic situation was worsening. It was at this time that the words "French Canadian" and "French Canadian nationality" came into current use. The movement was also supported by Irish groups. Lastly, in 1830 the July Revolution in France tended to intensify anti-British feelings and yearnings for independence. Already by 1830 powerful revolutionary influences were making headway among the members of the *parti patriote*. Soon the party became aware that a radical wing had been formed. It centred around the Nelson brothers, Brown, Girod and Côté, all of whom believed that only in a revolution could the oligarchy, the seigneurs and the clergy be swept away along with colonial ties. These are the factors that account in one way or another for Papineau's new orientation.

In 1826 Papineau presided over a reorganization of the *parti canadien*, as a result of which it took the name of *parti patriote*. The newspaper *La Minerve* was also founded to become the organ of a party which looked to the Montreal region for its most solid support. There the Papineaus, Vigers and Cherriers enjoyed an enormous influence. Then, as racial and social tensions grew more aggravated, the programme of the *parti canadien* underwent a transformation. In 1830 Papineau openly avowed his republican convictions. In the forefront of his new teachers was Jefferson, who inspired the main lines of his thinking on democracy: a liberal conception of the state; decentralization; the idealization of the small peasant proprietor; a hatred of England, of aristocracy and of monarchy; revulsion against speculation and monopolies; and above all the North American destiny of democracy. Rousseau, Benjamin Constant, Lamennais, de Tocqueville and Babeuf also influenced Papineau in the same direction. Drawing inspiration from them, he proclaimed a programme designed to expand the powers of the laity: separation of church and state, education by lay teachers, full freedom of religion.

He insisted, too, on Lower Canada's democratic and North American destiny; at the very most, he would have accepted some vague economic connection with Great Britain as the last step towards independence. But Papineau was not only a convinced and rigid republican, he was also an uncompromising nationalist. To see in him only a liberal turned republican, as he himself pretended, is to misapprehend his career. He was the first French Canadian nationalist leader, and his nationalism was rooted in his conservative tendencies. The herald of democracy could double as the hero of national independence. He set himself up as the spokesman of an oppressed people, attached to their past and their traditions, and anxious, as he asserted, for independence in order to preserve them. More than ever, the "man of the people" conceived of Lower Canada as the natural habitat of the French Canadians. There they were called to perpetuate their culture and traditional institutions. He believed that by rallying around the banner of democracy they could one day take up their national destiny and deprive the Anglo-Saxon minority of all forms of solid initiative, even the possibility of recruitment through immigration. It was by following the example of the Americans that the French Canadians could recover their national genius and at the same time abolish those false elements with which they had been burdened by European traditions of aristocracy and monarchy.

But Papineau wanted his compatriots to avoid those risks which liberty and equality were made to run, even in the United States, by an excess of the "commercial spirit". He dreamt of a French Canadian democratic state founded on a population mainly agricultural but moral, enlightened and prosperous. Obviously this Utopian state could not do without a class of business men. Their function would be to sell Canadian farm products, either in the raw state or converted by numerous small industries, to those limitless markets which free trade would open up. But these new-style capitalists, created by the very needs of the agrarian society, would never be given the opportunity of turning into speculators or of reaping profits by a monopoly of the state machinery. Would not their training and, even more, the very mechanism of democratic institutions prevent an oligarchy from seizing power? Would not an agricultural population, aware of its interests and accustomed to bearing its responsibilities, manifest a keen discrimination in the choice of its representatives? Would not the role of the liberal professions, the enlightened *élite*, serve as counterweight to the ambitions of the merchants and seigneurs? Nevertheless, in Papineau's scheme of thought the social equilibrium would rest upon two fundamental institutions, so far as these could be restored to their original meaning: seigneurial tenure and French common law. The first seemed essentially favourable to an equal distribution of landed property, when the seigneur was conceived of as the guardian of social

equality and as an insurmountable obstacle to capitalist speculation. It possessed, moreover, what seemed to Papineau a further great advantage, that of maintaining the individuality of Lower Canada in the face of the surrounding Anglo-Saxon bloc. Thanks to the French common law, the indispensable support of the seigneurial regime, Lower Canada would be ready to develop in the true sense of its traditions. Finally, though an ardent anti-clerical, Papineau had reached the position where he could see in Catholicism a national institution which in some ways possessed the same advantages as the seigneurial regime and the French common law. Blinded by this hatred for England and the English merchants, he had come to defend the very ecclesiastical structure which, as the supporter of liberal ideas, he so greatly condemned. It is understandable that his contemporaries became lost in this tangled skein of thinking, so full of contradictions. It is understandable, too, that his opponents accused him of projecting mediaeval dreams.

This ambiguity of thought even permitted Papineau to rally the most diverse elements in the ranks of the *parti patriote et republicain*: the French Canadian middle class, a few English liberals, the Irish, the American-born farmers in the Eastern Townships, and the French Canadian rural classes. On the other hand, he encountered bitter opposition from the bureaucracy, English merchants and farmers, the clergy, and the descendants of the old-time seigneurial nobility. In one way or another, Papineau's opponents had an immense influence over the people. After 1830 the conflict between the two groups entered a more violent phase, leaving little scope for those who desired compromise. Thanks to his personality, his oratorical gifts and the aspirations which he embodied, Papineau became the object of a veritable myth. To his supporters he was the symbol of the power of ideas, patriotism, unselfishness, strength, energy and courage. Some country folk spoke of making him "king" and others, more numerous, considered him the "Messiah" whose coming was awaited for the liberation of French Canadians from colonial slavery. Papineau came to believe in his own myth and dreamt of becoming the president of a French Canadian republic. In spite of the pressures exerted by the revolutionary elements he tried, while strengthening his party, to remain true to his method of systematic opposition; this, in the long run, must elicit concessions from the British government.

But his hopes of success grew fainter as the years passed. His anxiety increased over the profound internal divisions within the *parti patriote*. It seems likely that from 1834 he thought seriously of a revolution. And it is certain that he was no stranger to the designs of the People's Bank, whose directors in 1835 were planning the accumulation of funds for a rebellion. But a major occurrence was about to change the course of events and precipitate a call to arms.

The resolutions presented to the Parliament of Westminster by Lord Russell in the spring of 1837 condemned the claims of the *parti patriote* point by point. This, coming at a time of severe economic depression, had a conclusive effect.

REBEL OR MARTYR (1837)?

Russell's resolutions forced the *patriotes* to submit or take up arms. The left wing of the party was apparently willing to rebel, while the right wing, grouped around the Quebec leaders, was inclined to make a less extreme response. For his own part, Papineau appears to have hesitated about becoming embroiled in a revolutionary adventure. But he could not extricate himself from a movement which he, more than any other, had helped to push in an extremist direction. Had he not wished to become the president of a French Canadian republic? By abandoning his post he would have run the risk of losing his wife's esteem; she would not have stood for such weakness in her husband. It is highly probable that at the beginning of May Papineau presented to the chief leaders of the *patriote* movement a project for resistance designed to meet the views of every faction. This plan received the approval of the People's Bank directors. It entailed, in the first place, the inciting of public opinion against Russell's resolutions by a series of large meetings in the counties, so as to intimidate the imperial government. At the same time, it was decided to promote a policy of boycotting imported products, with the avowed object of making England "feel the pinch". Only if these measures proved ineffective would the *patriotes* take up arms to win the independence of Lower Canada. On 10 May 1837 Papineau made two wills, for he realized fully the possible consequences of these schemes. In the first he settled his estate in his wife's favour. Then, changing his mind, he made a second will in which, foreseeing his wife's death, he divided his property among his children.

From this time the Central and Permanent Committee at Montreal, founded in 1834, became a body charged with the co-ordination, under Papineau's direction, of the action of the *patriotes* all across the province. During the summer local sections were established to the south and north of Montreal. The Association of the Sons of Liberty appeared in September, its true objects being revolutionary. The division of this society into two sections, civil and military, reproduced the twofold intention of Papineau's plan of resistance.

A meeting, which called itself an Assembly, was held at Saint Charles on October 23rd. This consummated the campaign of agitation designed to bring about concessions from the government or lead to a decision to take up arms. It was, first of all, Papineau's work, even if it was left to the more radical of his followers to make an open

avowal of revolutionary intentions. He himself, aided by several lieutenants, prepared the resolutions, and it was he who drew up the address to "the people of Lower Canada". True, he maintained in this speech his emphasis on the boycott of taxed products, by which means he sought to aggravate the economic crisis. But he also advised the people to replace government-appointed officers in the judiciary and the militia with men of their own choice. He did, it is true, recommend that acts of violence be avoided. None the less, the fact remains that this meeting constituted for all practical purposes a declaration of independence for six counties. The radicals and the government interpreted it in this way. Moreover, Papineau was aware of the military plans drawn up on this occasion. Legal opposition was the mask for a less innocent enterprise.

The government could not be expected to wait for the winter freeze-up before taking steps to intervene. Around the first week of November there were rumours in Montreal that the *patriote* leaders had been arrested. After conferring with a delegate from Upper Canada, Papineau left the city on November 13th.

He went to Saint Charles and Saint Denis to join the other leaders. There, in the midst of general excitement, the hour of insurrection was finally decided upon; it was to coincide with the uprising in Upper Canada that had been fixed for December 7th. Control of the movement was entrusted to a committee, in which Papineau and Doctor O'Callaghan took charge of civil questions and Wolfred Nelson of military matters. A few days later Papineau appointed T. S. Brown a general at the Saint Charles camp. Then the government troops struck. Because of the leaders' short-comings and Papineau's eternal hesitations, the *patriotes* were in no state to confront trained soldiers. In the morning of 23 November, shortly before the action, Papineau had an interview with E.-R. Fabre of the People's Bank and decided to leave the village of Saint Denis. He was later to find it difficult to explain his reasons for this precipitous departure. The following day he made his way to Saint Charles and then returned to Saint Denis. Early in December, seeing the game was lost, he made his way to the United States.

How is such inglorious conduct to be explained? Fear, hesitation, attachment to family and property, an incapacity for facing his responsibilities — all these factors seem to have come into play from the moment the rebellion broke out. It seems likely that the experience of a revolution, even more than his struggles as party leader, led to situations too full of anguish for this "revolutionary of a philosophic age". Be that as it may, Papineau's behaviour during the troubles is not, as certain historians seem able to believe, a mere accident. It is tied in with the weaknesses that he always showed in action.

THE REFUGEE (1837-1845)

Papineau was deeply affected by the defeat of the rebellion. His letters clearly reveal the confusion in which he found himself on his arrival in the United States. Already he was looking for an explanation of the events he had lately lived through, one that he could find both valid and reassuring. First of all, he consoled himself by reflecting on the "unalterable stability of his principles", and soon he placed the entire responsibility for the insurrection on the government. "We did not know that it was conspiring to wipe us out and to start a civil war against the people . . . It chose its time to provoke us, forcing unprepared men to an untimely resistance . . .". Under these conditions he could fearlessly confer upon himself the martyr's halo. George Bancroft, the American historian and future statesman, saw in such an attitude of mind a way to attract popular sympathy for the *patriotes* and he encouraged Papineau in this course. But the attitude had long been habitual in Papineau.

Shortly after his arrival in the United States Papineau renewed contact with the other refugees. At this time the sympathies of the Americans were strongly in favour of the *patriotes*. Papineau even succeeded in meeting influential men who were ready to support a return encounter. Generals Wool and Scott considered the leadership of an expedition. Papineau accepted the plan and on 20 December 1837, at Albany, he drew up a third will in which his wife was appointed residuary legatee. But a meeting of the refugees, held at Middlebury, Vermont, led to the failure of this scheme. Papineau refused to accept a declaration of independence calling for the abolition of seigneurial rights, common law and tithes. There followed a schism with the radical group.

The radical *patriotes* then began a violent campaign against Papineau. They accused him of being responsible for their past defeats and present difficulties. The more moderate excused their chief by saying that one could be a "Franklin without being a Washington". Already several refugees were talking of his "poltroonery" at Saint Denis, and Côté was even determined to tear down the "idol". Eventually, in the interests of the French Canadian cause a plot was formed to make Papineau go to France. The pretext for the voyage was the arousing of sympathy for the French Canadians. He left New York in February, 1839.

Papineau did not pause to reflect upon the uselessness of this mission. For some time he frequented republican salons, but as M. de Pontois, the French Ambassador at Washington, had already told him, France was not disposed to intervene in Canadian affairs. Nevertheless, he decided to establish himself temporarily at Paris, where

his wife and children, except for his eldest son, came to join him. There he led an existence made difficult by financial and family problems. He shared his time between his family and his friends, several Irishmen and some Frenchmen of republican and socialist persuasions. Among these were Lamennais, Béranger, Bossange, the Guillemots, Ternaux-Compans, Louis Blanc and others. After the departure of his wife in 1843 he spent a large part of his leisure in the main archival repositories in Paris, where he copied documents relating to French rule in Canada. It was not until 1845, three years after he had been granted amnesty, that he once again made his way to Canada, having first visited Italy and Switzerland.

RETURN TO POLITICS (1847-1854)

Papineau came back from Europe with strengthened republican convictions. "I am therefore more than ever the passionate friend of democratic liberties, the enemy of kings, nobles and priests, who are everywhere in league together for the exploitation of the majority to profit their caste." He returned, too, with nationalist convictions no less strong. Since 1838 Canada's progress seemed to him more than ever to depend on annexation with the United States. This would unite two peoples who were alike the custodians of North American traditions. But the union of French Canadians with the American republic would not mean their complete integration. Lower Canada would concede to the federal government only power over matters of general interest, external commerce, armed forces and currency, keeping entire control over institutions essential to its development as a nationality: the seigneurial regime, common law, education, and, in general, all civil rights.

Papineau had decided not to return to public life. This was because he realized the lack of unanimity among the French Canadian population. He had no more intention now of supporting the conciliatory attitude of his brother and of D. B. Viger than he had before. He continued to believe in the technique of systematic obstruction as the only way to achieve his nationalist and republican objectives. He was more sympathetic to Lafontaine's point of view, but could not adhere fully to his programme: the acceptance of the Union, the abolition of seigneurial rights and the demand for responsible government. Past quarrels of course precluded his alliance with the Tories. Lastly, as in the years just before 1837, he rejected anti-clericalism; and this cut him off from the radicals of both Canadas. But he was "inhabited by the demon of politics"; it gratified his idealism, his ambition and his need for approval. Moreover it must be said that he had no intention, in the event of his returning to politics, of sharing power with anyone. Pushed by his wife and former supporters, he agreed, not very enthusiastically, to stand for election in 1847.

For his part, Lafontaine was not inclined to turn over leadership of the reform group to his rival. In the spring of 1837 he had worked out a plan for a new political formation, to be led by him and to comprise all the opponents of the seigneurial regime. Though offering rich prospects, this coalition had not come about. Lafontaine was still prepared to take Papineau, that "man of great talent", into his party, but he did not in any way wish to grant him precedence. When Papineau refused to accept the younger man's programme and leadership, Lafontaine decided on an open breach. These are the chief motives that led to the reopening in public of the question about the part played by the *patriote* leader during the first rebellion. Papineau was violently attacked by Wolfred Nelson, the "hero of Saint Denis". He emerged from the quarrel, which he had partly started, humiliated and diminished in the eyes of the people. He remained in the Assembly until 1854, but only in the role of irreducible and isolated oppositionist. Henceforth, annexation to the United States was to be his single political creed. And so he decided to devote himself entirely to improving his seigniory and to forget the vexations of public life in the tranquillity of nature.

RETIREMENT AT MONTEBELLO

Ever since leaving the Seminary of Quebec Papineau had dreamt of a calm and ordered life, surrounded by nature, family and books. In the hope of making his dream one day come true, he had bought the seigniory of Petite Nation from his father a short while before his marriage in 1818. But his wife obstinately resisted this constantly renewed project, for it ran contrary to her tastes and her need to dominate, as well as to her ambitions. The continual presence of her free-thinking husband might have a bad influence on the piety of her son, whom she ardently hoped to see enter the church. All things considered, a state of affairs which required Papineau to be at Quebec for a large part of the year was preferable, in her eyes, to the situation that might arise from his leading the life of a gentleman farmer. Certainly she loved and admired her husband and was prepared for any sacrifice that would ensure the success of his political career; but she could see him only in his role of *patriote*. She spared no effort to make her husband continue his career in politics. He was a man highly susceptible to the opinions of his wife; and she did a great deal both to keep him at his post and to strengthen his conservatism.

It was she who had finally decided Papineau to go to France in the spring of 1839. The longer he stayed in France, the more Papineau grew uncertain over his future. He was afraid that on his return to Canada he would again find himself hurled into public life.

He even tried, though without success, to sell his seignior, with the shortlived intention of settling in France or the United States. In 1843 his wife decided to return to Canada. With the support of every member of the family she soon demanded her husband's presence in Montreal, ostensibly to look after the family's financial affairs, which every day were growing more precarious. Actually she was longing more than ever to see her husband resume his place as "national leader" of the French Canadians. In 1844 Papineau wrote to O'Callaghan from Paris: "Their entreaties that I promise to return are becoming so eager that perhaps I will be weak enough to return more quickly. I am in a very wearisome state of indecision, which would not be the case if she [his wife] had been sensible enough to stay here with the children until the English political climate grew a good deal more liberal." In 1845, as we have seen, he at last gave way.

On his return to Montreal Papineau set about putting his affairs in order. After that he thought seriously of carrying out his childhood dream, which had taken on a more definite shape in proportion to the repulses dealt him in his public life. He thought of putting into practice the ideal he had formed of the seigneur: the seigneur should be the protector of his *censitaires* as well as a "colonization agent" and a guardian of social equality. Papineau was conscious of his beneficent role towards his *censitaires* and saw this ideal seigneur as the trustee of a function that was all the nobler for ensuring the survival of the nationality. There was, for him, no question of becoming an egocentric, profit-hungry capitalist. Certainly Papineau did show much benevolence and indulgence where his *censitaires* were concerned, but he never succeeded in building his ideal society. He was fond of the country folk around him, but he was fonder still of his family. His seignior was never more than a family enterprise, as was the custom among the French Canadians. He was a conservative and diligent business man, preferring modest profits and safe investments to daring long-term speculations.

His dreams of family life amid the joys of nature ran foul of opposition from wife and daughters. They were unanimous in expressing their distaste for country life. Although they agreed to live at Petite Nation much of the year, and sometimes all of it, they never resigned themselves to their fate. With the object of pleasing them, the usually thrifty Papineau built Montebello, a luxurious manor-house surrounded by gardens and orchards. But nothing would do; they remained unaffected by the scene, of which Papineau himself never tired. This incompatibility in taste proved an enduring source of conflict. "Being unable to make them smile when they are alone," said Papineau, "one must flee from them."

And Papineau, who had seen the ruin of his political undertakings, was not to be spared private grief as well. His children, clever

but overly sensitive, had been brought up in a closed environment by a mother who was puritanical, authoritative, very devout but extraordinarily possessive. Before 1837 their father had almost always been absent; afterwards there was a series of family disagreements. Thus when the children grew to adulthood they were timid, uneasy, highly strung and unfitted to mix well outside the family circle. One son, Lactance, after having studied medicine at Paris, became mentally unbalanced and ended his days in an asylum at Lyons. Gustave's brief life was hardly more auspicious. He was an intelligent boy, but nervous and unstable, and he died in 1851 at the age of twenty-two. Nor did Azélie, the wife of Napoléon Bourassa, lead a much more equable life. After 1856 she began to suffer from recurring attacks of hysteria, until her death in 1869. On the other hand, Papineau found consolation in his eldest daughter Ezilda. Thorough, methodical, punctilious, head-strong, but endlessly devoted, she strove to soften her father's old age and undertook the upbringing of the Bourassa orphans. In the same way, Papineau found support from his eldest son Amédée. This former "Son of Liberty" had become a steady and meticulous civil servant. He was endowed with a sense of thriftiness so formidable that Papineau sometimes found it disturbing.

These painful events left their mark on Papineau's character, already inclined towards pessimism. Fortunately he was able to draw the resources he needed to overcome his misanthropic tendencies from his love of nature, his intellectual interests and his real affection for his children and grand-children. He died in 1871, faithful to his rationalist convictions.

CONCLUSION

Was Papineau a great man? There is no doubt that he represented the very model of a great man for a good number of his contemporaries, and he has not lacked later admirers. Thanks to the brilliant and dramatic personality concealing his deep-seated weakness, he did exert a unique influence on the French Canadians. He awakened them to ideas of nationalism and liberty. He was a striking incarnation of their aspirations. But in his actions the appeal he made was more to negative sentiments. Of these, a persecution complex and racial hatred stirred up useless agitation and reinforced the passive attitude of a people who had taken refuge in their own past and really had no great wish to change it. His conservatism, while typical of his

countrymen, helped destroy the ferment of liberty that he had begun. The fact remains, however, that Papineau represented for his era two major currents of French Canadian thought: nationalism and liberalism.

But in 1837 what value would there have been in independence and democracy for an illiterate population which had no dynamic middle class, was encircled by mediaeval institutions, and, in addition, lived by an almost parasitic agriculture? The result of independence and the abolition of the preferential system would have been the closing of the British market. By adopting this course, at a time when only slight prospects were offered by the American market, the French Canadians would have given themselves up to a long period of economic under-development. They would thereby not only have retarded the development of Upper Canada, they would have doomed their own democracy to sterility. In a word, it is clear that revolution would have served only the interests of the liberal professions and would certainly not have solved Lower Canada's economic problems. A new "family compact" would have emerged, possessing no true administrative and middle class traditions.

Such would have been the result of independence built upon hatred. French Canadian society had of necessity to reform the whole of its traditional institutions. This reform could only have been made possible by clear co-operation between the French Canadian middle class and the Anglo-Saxon businessmen. With time such co-operation would have brought forth a new concept of the role of the state and a true disposition of individual liberties. Lafontaine, realist that he was, understood this after 1837. Papineau the liberal understood it even better. But Papineau the nationalist, because of his sentimental attachment to an idealized past and because of ambition, fear and his need for security, was incapable of admitting it. His instinctive repugnance for pragmatism grew and hardened under his hatred for Anglo-Saxons. The barrier so erected blocked any clear view of the facts.

The imperative need for adaptation with which the French Canadians were faced after the decline of the fur trade early in the nineteenth century continued to make itself felt in the Union period and after their entry into Confederation. A refusal or an inability to re-define their institutions according to the exigencies of the modern world tended to hold back their creative possibilities and seduced them into seeking a privileged status within the Canadian Confederation. The American alternative which Papineau recommended could only have made this fundamental necessity for adaptation more acute.

By resolving his inner conflict between "liberal" and "traditionalist" in favour of the past, Papineau became, in Garneau's words, "the image of our nation". His personal solution was typical of the continued effacement of secular forces in French Canadian society. If the myth of Papineau has lived on, it is because the two-fold aspirations which he stirred to life and which he incarnated have persisted, often at the cost of perpetuating their disturbing contradictions.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

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